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Paraguay: Potential Successors To Stroessner

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A Research Paper

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August 1985

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Paraguay: Potential Successors To Stroessner

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A Research Paper

*This paper was prepared by [redacted]
Office of Central Reference,
Office of African and Latin American Analysis. It
was coordinated with the Directorate of Operations.
Comments and queries are welcome and may be
directed to the Chief, South America Branch, Office
of Central Reference, [redacted]*

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**Paraguay: Potential
Successors to Stroessner**

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Summary*Information available
as of 15 July 1985
was used in this report.*

Although 72-year-old President Alfred Stroessner is not expected to leave office anytime soon, political infighting is intensifying. The power struggle within Stroessner's Colorado Party pits those who unreservedly endorse his authoritarian policies against those who appear to favor a limited opening of the political system. The latter group, known as the traditionalist faction, has been gaining ground. Its leaders, along with several influential military officers, are likely to play key roles in the transition if Stroessner leaves office within the next few years. []

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The Constitution sets forth a formal succession process involving congressional action and national elections. We believe, however, that the succession will be shaped through negotiation among Colorado and military powerbrokers. We expect this process to select a president with relatively broad popular support. []

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Leading contenders, in our judgment, include Supreme Court Chief Justice and traditionalist Colorado politician Luis Argana; veteran traditionalist Colorado leaders Edgar Insfrán and Juan Manuel Frutos; the Defense Minister, Maj. Gen. Gaspar Martínez; and a respected senior military officer, Gen. Gerardo Johanssen []

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Any of these men would be likely to maintain Paraguay's pro-West foreign policy. They probably would respond to Western and regional pressure for a more democratic political system by easing controls on elections. We do not believe they would establish a full-fledged democracy, however. []

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A likely key powerbroker during a transition would be Maj. Gen. Andrés Rodríguez, an Army corps commander whose power is second only to Stroessner's. []

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[] Because of his notoriety, we believe he would operate behind the scenes in a transition, rather than seek the presidency. Nonetheless, a protracted power struggle resulting in a paralyzed government and civil disorders might lead Rodríguez to seize power and impose a tough authoritarian government. Relations between such a regime and the United States would probably be subject to strains over human rights and drug trafficking. []

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Using an alternative method of analysis, that applies cost benefit and social choice theory to political issues, we tested the validity of our more conventional approach. The results support our analysis that Stroessner's successor would be selected by a brokered process—perhaps endowed with a facade of openness—in which the actual choice would be made behind the scenes. the military would prevail over the Colorado traditionalists in any dispute over the succession. The complete findings are in the appendix.

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Contents

	<i>Page</i>
Summary	iii
Scope Note	vii
Introduction	1
Power Within the Regime	1
Colorado Party	2
The Traditionalists	2
The Palace Faction	4
The Military	5
Outlook	7

Appendix

	Selecting a Consensus Candidate	11
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Scope Note

This research paper discusses the political elite, powerbrokers, and presidential aspirants who will figure in the political transition that will follow President Stroessner's eventual departure from power. It also speculates on the succession process. It assumes that the wider political climate will remain sufficiently stable for the dominant political elite to impose its will on the populace at large. This paper does not predict how a transition would affect Paraguay's political course or stability. []

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Paraguay: Potential Successors to Stroessner

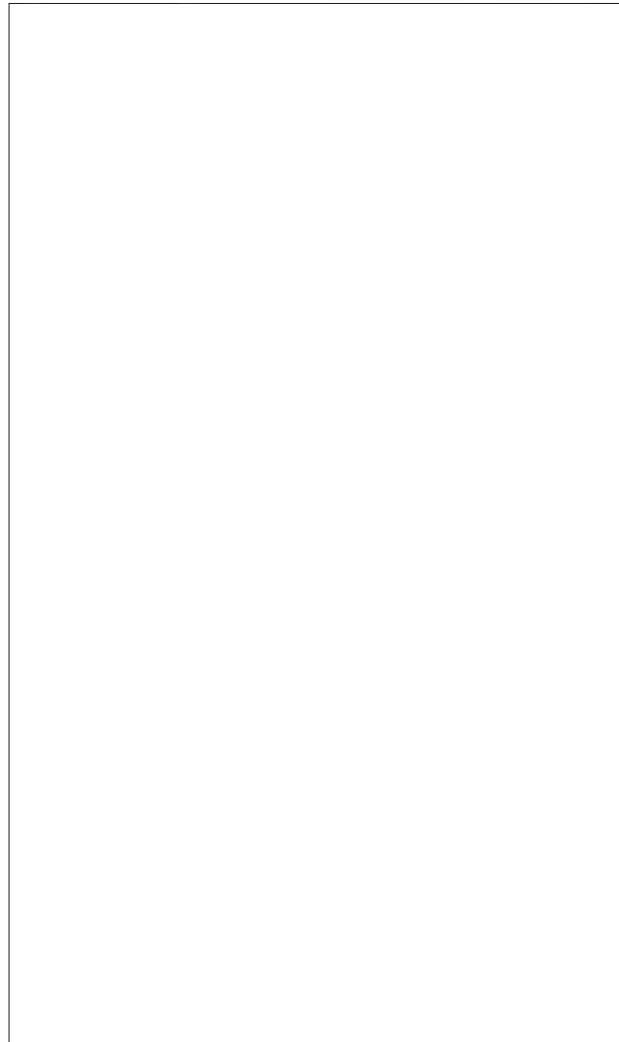
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Introduction

President Alfredo Stroessner, the longest serving head of government in the Western hemisphere, firmly controls Paraguay. He has maintained power for more than three decades through classic authoritarian methods: rewriting the Constitution, controlling elections, restricting the opposition, building a solid base for the ruling Colorado Party, curbing civil liberties and using state-of-siege powers, restricting union and university activities, and using the armed forces to impose his will. In the process, Stroessner has brought his previously strife-torn country prolonged political stability and significant—if skewed—economic development. He also has responded to the Paraguayans' strong sense of national unity—forged through a history of armed conflict with neighbors—by maintaining a measure of regional independence and playing more powerful Brazil and Argentina off against each other. []

There is little evidence that Stroessner will leave office anytime soon. The President, now 72, is occasionally rumored to have health problems, however, and he has indicated that he might retire when his term ends in 1988. The prospect of his departure—especially if it occurs suddenly—raises questions about how and by whom Paraguay will be governed. Since seizing control over 30 years ago following a period of severe political instability, Stroessner has concentrated power and has taken no steps to groom a successor or prepare for an orderly transition. []

In recent years, [] political infighting has increased within the regime between those who hope for some degree of political reform after Stroessner's departure and those who favor continued authoritarian rule. We believe this struggle will intensify, especially if the President continues to avoid planning for the succession. []



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Power Within the Regime

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The pillars of Stroessner's regime are the President's Colorado Party and the armed forces. The party administers the government and marshals popular

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support for the regime, while the military provides the muscle to maintain domestic stability. Opposition parties are weak and fragmented, []

Colorado Party

The Colorado Party has been Paraguay's dominant political group since it emerged as the winner in the civil strife of the late 1940s and early 1950s. The party is strongly anti-Communist but otherwise non-ideological. Mass based and well organized, it has considerable grassroots support and a foothold in most segments of society. All armed forces personnel and government employees are required to belong to the party. []

Given the party's dominance, the Colorados are virtually certain to play a key role in shaping the eventual transition. Two main groups within the party have long vied for control, [] and their influence in a transition probably will be relative to their power within the party. Although the two factions are based to a considerable degree on personal ties among their members, there are also discernible substantive differences between them. One has been described [] as a hardline—or "palace"—faction that unreservedly endorses Stroessner's authoritarian approach, while the other has been portrayed as a relatively moderate grouping that favors a more open system. []

The hardliners tend to have closer personal ties to the President. The more moderate group, known as the traditionalist faction, is led by men whose families have played major roles in the party for the past four decades. []

During most of the Stroessner era the hardliners have generally been the more powerful group, but their dominance has never been absolute, and in recent years it has eroded. The traditionalists now hold a commanding majority in the party's governing junta, a group of senior Colorado officials responsible for electing party officers. We agree with the US Embassy's analysis that the growing strength of the more moderate faction stems mainly from economic development and expanding ties with the outside world.

Modern transportation and communications have created a new middle class that desires a more responsive political system. []

Divisions between the two factions have increasingly surfaced during the past year. Last fall the traditionalists demonstrated their strength by successfully pressuring the hardliners—and Stroessner—to abandon efforts to appoint the President's hardline private secretary, Mario Abdo Benítez, to a senior party post. (This was one of the first disputes within Stroessner's ruling party to make the press.) More recently, a struggle between the two groups within the party's university wing has intensified and has received growing attention in the Paraguayan press. []

The Traditionalists. We think the traditionalists will have the edge in any succession. Although the power of the hardliners stems largely from their relationship with Stroessner, the traditionalists have wider power bases in the party and enjoy greater popularity in the country, according to Embassy reporting. []

Three popular traditionalist leaders are likely to play important roles in the post-Stroessner era, according to US Embassy reporting. All are possible successors to Stroessner, in our judgment. The three are long-time party stalwarts Luis Argana, the chief justice of the Supreme Court; Edgar Insfrán, former Minister of Interior; and Juan Manuel Frutos, a senior party leader. []

Of the three, *Luis Argana*, a 53-year-old, veteran Colorado politician with a reputation for reform-mindedness and relative honesty, appears to have the edge. Argana is experienced, tough, and capable, and he enjoys wide support among senior military officers, [] We believe this support is attributable in part to his ability to avoid antagonizing military leaders as he has risen in the party ranks. []

When he was named Chief Justice by Stroessner in 1984, Argana was directed to clean up the image of the judicial system, but not to exceed his mandate. He

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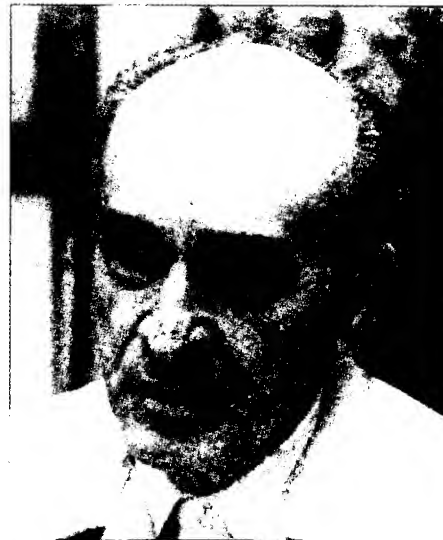
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Luis Argana [redacted]



Edgar Insfrán [redacted]

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has proven adept at maneuvering a tricky course—reforming the judiciary while supporting the government's authoritarian approach in politically sensitive cases. His actions—he has removed several judges for corruption—have won him esteem among younger Colorado politicians. [redacted]

His reputation for honesty, however, may not be deserved—Embassy sources have linked him in the past with Army strongman Maj. Gen. Andrés Rodríguez [redacted]

Paraguayan politicians have voiced a range of opinions about Argana to US Embassy officials. Some in his own party say he is highly opinionated [redacted]

[redacted] For example, as Colorado majority leader in the Chamber of Deputies during the early 1980s, he was disliked by some of his party's legislators because of his autocratic methods. Nevertheless, according to Embassy reporting, Colorado legislators under his leadership sometimes were able to block, delay, or modify legislation presented by the executive branch. Moreover, Argana was respected by the opposition, which viewed him as an honest, independent politician. [redacted]

Edgar Insfrán was a leading figure in the early years of the Stroessner regime. Forced out of politics by Stroessner in the mid-1960s, he is edging back. He

has lived quietly in Asunción and has maintained close relationships with various party activists and Cabinet ministers. In April 1985 Insfrán told US Embassy officers that he sensed growing support for himself among the population. He said high-ranking Colorado Party and government officials have asked him to help them reestablish discipline and unity within the party. [redacted]

Stroessner may soon appoint Insfrán to replace octogenarian Colorado Party president Juan Ramón Chavez, a move that Stroessner has resisted in the past. [redacted]

As Minister of Interior (1956-66), Insfrán [redacted] helped the President consolidate his rule. He orchestrated a harsh crackdown on antigovernment violence and, because of his reputation for forcefulness, was able to build a large following in the ruling party. US Embassy officials say that the 64-year-old Insfrán is still widely regarded as one of the few Paraguayans of presidential stature. They consider him to be articulate and competent and to have a good understanding of international affairs. He is highly ambitious and energetic and has a keen political acumen. [redacted]

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Juan Manuel Frutos [redacted]

Juan Manuel Frutos, 62, is a popular senator. The son of a former President of Paraguay, he is a longtime leader of the traditionalist faction and is chief of the powerful Rural Welfare Institute (formerly the Land Reform Agency). He was one of the party's three vice presidents from 1969 until late 1984. He lost his post as a result of party maneuvering in the same leadership shuffle in which his opponent, hardliner Abdo Benítez, was also denied a vice-presidential seat. [redacted]

US Embassy officials describe Frutos as [redacted] shrewd, articulate, and tenaciously anti-Communist. He is wary of all outside influence, even that of the United States. Embassy officials add that Frutos wants to prevent another military figure like Stroessner from co-opting the party. [redacted]

Octogenarian *Juan Ramón Chavez*, because of his age and lack of a power base—would make an ideal interim president. A widely respected member of an old-line Colorado Party family, he is President of the Senate and of the Colorado Party. We think his main role is to lend a facade of legitimacy to Stroessner's authoritarian government. At 82, he is unlikely to remain president of the party much longer—a factor that has fueled the jockeying for position among leaders of the two Colorado factions. US Embassy



Juan Ramón Chavez [redacted]

officials say Stroessner has long regarded Chavez—a member of the party's inner circle for more than 30 years—as unthreatening. [redacted]

The Palace Faction. The most prominent leader of the hardline or palace group, *Mario Abdo Benítez*, is the only hardliner with any potential for influence in the post-Stroessner period. Several other hardline faction leaders hold significant government posts, but they derive their power solely from Stroessner and, unlike Abdo Benítez, have no independent support within the party. [redacted]

We agree with US diplomats that Abdo Benítez's influence is based on political cunning, hard work, and his long, close association with Stroessner; he has been the President's private secretary for over 20 years. He has built a power base in Colorado youth organizations and has placed his supporters in positions of influence elsewhere in the regime, according to US Embassy reporting. He tours the country incessantly, speaking and handing out favors. The Embassy also reports, however, that he does not have much support in the military, even though many officers probably share his authoritarian attitudes. In

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Mario Abdo Benítez [redacted]

fact, he is disliked by key military figures, including General Rodríguez [redacted]

Abdo Benítez, 57, is one of three secretaries of the ruling party and chairman of one of the Colorado governing junta's key committees. Although he failed to win a party vice-presidential post last year, he salvaged some of his political strength because of his support among party youth. This strength has concerned traditionalist party members, who view Abdo Benítez as the President's lackey [redacted] and they are trying to curtail this support, according to Embassy reporting. [redacted]

His [redacted] reputation has made Abdo Benítez the object of numerous political jokes, even among children. US Embassy officials say that he is highly ambitious, that he has acquired a wide range of business interests [redacted] and that he has frequently been Stroessner's frontman in business deals. The son of immigrant Lebanese shopkeepers, Abdo Benítez has no formal education and was virtually unknown before Stroessner's rise to power in the early 1950s. [redacted]

The Military

Besides the Colorado Party, the other major pillar of the Stroessner regime is the 16,000-man armed forces. The military, with its long history of involvement in

politics, is virtually certain to play a central role along with the Colorados in the post-Stroessner era. [redacted]

The military is dominated by senior officers who are widely believed to hold their positions because of their loyalty to the President. We believe that the primary objective of most of these officers in a political transition will be the establishment of a government that will allow them to continue engaging in lucrative ventures, [redacted] [redacted]

Some middle-grade officers are dissatisfied with the [redacted]

[redacted] Although we do not expect this grumbling to force a change of leadership, we believe that in a post-Stroessner transition some of the younger officers may side with those Colorado politicians and other civilians who seek a more open system of government. [redacted]

The three most influential figures in the military are those we regard as most likely to play key roles in a transition as well. They are Maj. Gen. Andrés Rodríguez, commander of the Army's important 1st Corps; Maj. Gen. Gaspar Martínez, the Minister of Defense; and Gen. Gerardo Johannsen, the chief of military training. [redacted]

Andrés Rodríguez, 62, is likely to be a key figure in any transition. He is the most powerful military officer and the second most influential person in the country after Stroessner. [redacted] Rodríguez maintains his power through [redacted] [redacted] intimidation, according to US Embassy reporting. Although we believe he will be an important power-broker in the post-Stroessner era, his notoriety probably will compel him to work behind the scenes rather than to try to succeed Stroessner himself. [redacted]

Rodríguez is the commander of Paraguay's best trained and equipped Army division. He has used his military command positions and ties to Stroessner

¹ Even though the President's eldest son, Air Force Maj. Gustavo Stroessner, has been mentioned as a possible successor, [redacted] he has neither the desire nor the military support. [redacted]

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Andrés Rodríguez [redacted]



Gerardo Johannsen [redacted]

both to enrich himself and to consolidate his domination over much of the armed forces. He has expanded his control by assigning his own men as commanders of major units, while transferring rivals to remote diplomatic posts. [redacted]

We believe Rodríguez's main support comes from fellow senior officers and members of the Colorado Party who have profited from his [redacted] business operations. For example, he is a close friend and business associate of Defense Minister Martínez and evidently also has ties to Frutos, the influential Colorado head of the Rural Welfare Institute. The US Embassy reports that the institute has given him large tracts of land. Rodríguez also enjoys important ties in Asunción's tightly knit society. He is related to the President through his daughter's marriage to one of Stroessner's sons. To enhance his credentials as a loyal member of the Colorado Party, he frequently appears at party functions in civilian clothes and sits with the party's civilian hierarchy. [redacted]

At the same time, because of Rodríguez's reputation [redacted]

[redacted] he is disliked by many Paraguayans, including traditionalist Colorados. His involvement in narcotics trafficking since the early 1970s is well publicized. Paraguayan narcotics authorities have told

the US Embassy that his ranch in the Chaco region is used as a base for smuggling and drug trafficking. His home in Asunción is a gaudy, sprawling chateau. [redacted]

Gen. Gerardo Johannsen, 58, is a popular officer with a reputation for relative honesty and competence. Embassy officials say that he is much preferred over Rodríguez by traditionalist Colorados, younger military officers, and opposition politicians and that he could emerge as Stroessner's successor. Although Johannsen, as chief of training, is less powerful than Rodríguez, he is close to Stroessner and serves as the President's special appointee for international intelligence matters. He appears to be one of the few senior military officers who has not used his position for excessive personal profit. [redacted]

[redacted] he openly acknowledges and discusses smuggling and corruption, and he is open to possible solutions. He is a serious and independent leader who is highly respected by his fellow officers. Although he respects, admires, and wants closer ties with the United States, he believes this country has been unnecessarily critical of Paraguay. [redacted]

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Gaspar Martínez [redacted]

Defense Minister *Gaspar Martínez* is likely to be another important powerbroker in the post-Stroessner era, and, in our judgment, he could emerge as a compromise candidate acceptable to both the military and the Colorado Party. Over the past decade he has been active in the Colorado Party and has bolstered his public image by spearheading a number of civic construction projects. The 61-year-old Martínez has close ties to Rodríguez dating from their school days and has been a close associate of Stroessner for at least two decades. According to the US Embassy, Martínez lacks presidential ambitions. Nonetheless, his support would help any contender because of his seniority and his influence in the military. [redacted]

People who have met Martínez have characterized him as smooth, intelligent, [redacted] In 1983 the Embassy reported that he had amassed large sums of money [redacted]

Outlook

If Stroessner leaves office within the next few years, we believe the succession will be shaped through a process of negotiation among military and Colorado

Constitutional Provisions for Succession

The Constitution's succession procedure has never been used. In the event of the president's death, resignation, or incapacitation, Article 179 provides for convocation of the national legislature and the Council of State—comprised of the cabinet, military representatives, and certain private citizens—within 24 hours to designate a provisional president. If two years of the presidential term have elapsed, the provisional president serves out his predecessor's term. If less than two years have elapsed, elections are to be held within three months to determine a presidential successor. The president must be a Paraguayan citizen, at least 40 years old, and a Roman Catholic. [redacted]

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Party Leaders. [redacted] analysis suggests a similar conclusion.)² Constitutional procedures for designating a successor are likely to be manipulated by military and Colorado powerbrokers behind the scenes. This process, in our view, will probably result in the selection of someone, such as Argana, who enjoys relatively broad acceptability within the Colorado Party and the armed forces. [redacted]

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In our judgment, a government headed by one of the traditionalist Colorado leaders would almost certainly maintain Paraguay's pro-West foreign policy. We believe such a leader would move toward a somewhat more open political system in response to middle-class aspirations and Western pressure—for example, by easing controls on elections. We do not believe a traditionalist leader would establish a full-fledged multiparty democracy, however. Members of this segment of the party, like many other Paraguayans, recall the instability and violence of the more politically competitive era of the late 1940s and early 1950s. Moreover, many senior military and civilian

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² For further information see appendix. [redacted]

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The Opposition

Because of the government's authoritarian tactics, opposition political parties—both legal and illegal—are weak and divided, [redacted]

[redacted] We believe that the opposition may be permitted a somewhat more active role during a transition but that these parties will lack the strength and opportunity to gain major influence. Some of the opposition parties may align with moderates in the Colorado Party. [redacted]

The opposition includes two legal parties that participate in the Stroessner regime's controlled elections, several illegal parties, and one legal party that is allied with some of the illegal parties and does not take part in elections. Except for the tiny, divided—and illegal—Communist Party, none of the opposition groups has a well-defined ideology or program. Most of them vaguely advocate a more open and honest political system. [redacted]

The Liberal Party and the Radical Liberal Party are legal and participate in elections. According to the US Embassy, neither has the organization, finances, or manpower to effectively oppose the Colorado Party. [redacted]

The National Accord is an umbrella grouping of four small opposition parties that remain outside the electoral process. Three of these groups—including the Christian Democratic Party, the Authentic Radical Liberal Party, and the Popular Colorado Movement (MOPOCO)—are illegal. The fourth—the Rev-

olutionary Febrerista Party (PRF)—is legally recognized by the Paraguayan Government. [redacted]

Among the opposition groups, the Stroessner regime has a particular aversion to MOPOCO, [redacted] MOPOCO was founded by a group of Colorado politicians who left the ruling party after losing out to Stroessner in power struggles during the 1950s. Most of these people went into exile in Argentina. [redacted]

Following the inauguration in December 1983 of Argentina's civilian President, Raúl Alfonsín, Stroessner permitted many political exiles to return to Paraguay as a gesture to the new Argentine leader, [redacted] Subsequently, however, he reverted to his longstanding policy of harassing and intimidating opponents. [redacted]

The banned Communist Party has only a few hundred members, [redacted] It is divided into pro-Soviet and pro-Chinese factions, but most of the membership is in exile in Communist countries or neighboring Argentina. [redacted] the USSR and Argentina's Moscow-oriented Communist Party provide financial and logistic support to the pro-Soviet Paraguayan Communists, and the pro-Chinese group has received similar support from Beijing. [redacted]

leaders are likely to press for a system in which they are assured of enough leverage to block any challenges to their lucrative [redacted] businesses. [redacted]

Another possible outcome would be a direct power grab by an authoritarian military figure—most likely General Rodríguez, who, we believe, commands the necessary troop strength. He probably would choose to operate behind the scenes, using his military power

to protect his [redacted] business ventures while supporting Argana or some other contender. Nonetheless, a protracted power struggle, resulting in a paralyzed government and perhaps accompanied by civil disorders, might lead Rodríguez to seize power and impose an authoritarian government under his direct control. Relations between such a regime and the United States would probably be subject to strains over human rights and drug trafficking. [redacted]

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Under another scenario, Stroessner at some point might designate Abdo Benítez as his successor. We think this is highly unlikely, however, as Stroessner almost certainly recognizes that such a move would be unacceptable to most military and party leaders.

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In our judgment, the far left in Paraguay, consisting essentially of the small, divided Communist Party, does not have much chance of wielding significant influence in the post-Stroessner period. Our evidence indicates that the Communists have been kept weak by years of repression under the Stroessner regime. The party appears to lack popular support, and we have seen little evidence of relationships between the Communists and other political groups.

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Appendix

[] Selecting a Consensus Candidate

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This approach applies cost benefit analysis and social choice theory to the analysis of political issues and political stability. [] provides a tested and systematic way to use country specialists' judgments about the relative strength of political actors, the outcomes those actors prefer, and the importance of an issue to each actor to make inferences about policy outcomes, the dynamics of the resolution of the issue, and other possible scenarios.

[]

A Brokered Selection

[] President Stroessner's successor will be selected by a brokered process. This process may be endowed with a facade of openness, but the actual choice would be made behind the scenes. []

The military probably has the most influence in deciding how Stroessner's successor will be chosen. In fact, the predicted outcome is very close, if not identical, to what the military wants. The traditionalist faction of the Colorado Party probably will have less influence than the military in determining how the successor will be selected. The traditionalists could push for greater political participation, perhaps following constitutional guidelines. They might even advocate elections from a list of candidates restricted to Colorado leaders. However, the traditionalists lack the clout to impose such an outcome if the military opposes it. []

The Colorado traditionalists may think that they could successfully challenge the military in Stroessner's absence. Given the projected configuration of political forces, the traditionalists would not be able to do so. The military would probably see any traditionalist demands or threats as mere posturing. Continued attempts by the traditionalists to get their way could bring a strong response from the military. []

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Even so, once the military became embroiled with the traditionalists, other groups would be encouraged to resist the military's demands. In these circumstances, the military might make minor concessions, but not enough to significantly change the outcome. []

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Stroessner's Role

The President's unwillingness to groom a successor indicates that he does not want to be involved in the process. Nevertheless, as the succession issue moves toward the top of Paraguay's political agenda, Stroessner will come under pressure to play a role. []

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If the President continues to stand on the sidelines, he probably will face considerable pressure from the Colorado traditionalists, the military, General Rodríguez, and Colorado youth to support their respective positions. He may see taking a strong stand on the issue—probably by selecting his replacement, albeit behind a facade of openness—as a way to dominate the issue and obviate the attempts of others to influence him. Such efforts, however, would be only partially successful. The military, including General Rodríguez, would force him to consider the views of the powerbrokers. []

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